

A Woman of Many Designs

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The Winter

*now the water is flat
thick purplish blue against
that cold sky
horizon deep as the curvature of the earth
sky and water in synergy
icy cold, timeless
those two forces
of the world brought
in seamless metaphor
they glide*

*my unconscious simmers
feelings move up into the distance
thoughts metabolize and spread
on that ethereal horizon
looking out at the depths
surging out of my body, time
and distance move together
there life begins and ends
in the turgid flatness of that vast lake
there I move past my thoughts
fast into the frigid air
out to the ends of the earth
the sky falling quickly*

Washington

*the buildings are magisterial
neo-classical and modern
frame the center
a forbidding machine
aggregating words and numbers
a monolith they say
impervious*

*cement and granite
carved to the specifications
its heart fed by
dense silicon chips
omnipotent armamentarium
but
at night the restaurants are full
pianos and clarinets
play in Georgetown and Dupont Circle
bookstores brim with avant-garde
sex flows in the streets
and on the other side of town
despair floats in the smoked brick alleys
guns dance*

*while the suburbs are lush
spread over Maryland and Virginia
farmland and forest converted to
condominiums and architectonic colonials*

*the obelisk points over the Potomac
it burns late into the night
and into the morning
sending out waves over the country
the blue oceans awash in electric currents
the city awakens in unison*

Her Voice

*she was from the hills
you could tell her voice
was as fresh as the clean
country she came from
sweet as cream
thick forests sweeping
over mountain trails
long roads winding down
to a hamlet with wood framed houses
the smell of the air and the quiet
of Sunday she remembered*

*but now inside the
metropolitan shell
professionalism like a
pancake syrup dripped around
and stained her fingers
but her voice rounding consonants
smooth and delicate
was
printed with her essence*

*still a child
though past thirty
she hunched her shoulders
and walked through the
restaurant filled with*

*immaculate clothes and
loud humming sounds of
conversation
she complained*

*it wasn't her style
she would rather
walk around the zoo
watch prairie dogs
pandas on toy benches*

*downtown the jazz
was rich, hypnotic
played elaborate rhythms
teasing the senses
but she was not impressed
with the marble bar
with the black tuxedos
the musicians wore
her glance moved away*

*she didn't like the
streets filled on a Friday night
crowds pouring into fancy bars
the imprimatur of the city
miniskirts and politics
stuffed with daiquiris and
waxen desires*

*she wanted nothing but the mountains
to pick apples
her cat and thoughts*

*nothing but the trails
in the soft light of the morning
spreading across her hamlet*

*in the city, thick with numbers
with faceless broad facades
of government buildings
planted monuments circling
the center of the universe
for her the buildings did not exist
they evaporated
in the white heat of a Potomac summer
the air drenched with the sweat of clerks
tourists, and bureaucrats
in the middle of her eye
the air disappeared too
far away, deep into the woods*

The Rabbit

*he was a rabbit
soft bellied and quick
he claimed*

*and self knowledge
being a sober forte
he was correct
charisma and eccentric charm
gave him more friends
than he could manage
a brilliant mind,
but with a rabbit's resolve
he could not
harness it to accomplish
what he wanted*

*people buzzed around him
young pretty women wanted
him as a friend but not
lover since rabbits
are needed only for petting*

*he spoke in quick clips
and moved determinedly
though his energy was sapped
splintered it seemed
in multitudes of interests*

*try as he could
he failed to face
the hard world where
rabbits, unprotected
are eaten and skinned
this he could not consider
so he stayed hidden
unwilling, naturally, to
risk becoming dinner*

Passion

*passion was part of her
so strong in her nature
it defined her
feelings like sculpture
in an inner landscape
surfaced on her olive
brown complexion
beautiful and mulatto she
thought of herself
carried from her upbringing
to the middle class
an intellectual wrapped in
twin despairs
her family disappeared in the
projects, pain poured into
veins and livers
while she struggled to
separate mind from affect
tragedy she kept well
defending herself with deception
feelings that couldn't hold
split away into the distance
charming and open
admirers circled and were
confidants
while she engaged the demons
mostly real
that made her bleed
undeservedly, for the
crimes of others*

Nights

*some nights uptown in Inwood
the streets are colored in yellow light
deserted by the time he was there
the buildings reflected their age
onto the sidewalks bathed in neon shadows
and the East River down the cliffs glistens*

*the old apartment buildings with art deco
trims sleep in the still air
he ran down the highway like a bullet
to the clubs downtown where flashes
of wanton youth travel out of the dark exits
and into the backseat*

*fast over the bridge to Brooklyn over and
through the black, ancient streets
through the back alleys of New York
to the back neighborhoods lost off of
Flatbush as far as the Kingdom of Laos
from the metropole lying splendid across
the river*

*and fast he went over the water on the
ancient bridge that rides into the
tenements where his great grandparents lived
at the backend of the great city*

*and fast he went to the clubs now rupturing
sleek skinned legs and black velvet coats
pushed him over to the sleeping
buildings that house the jade and gilded antiques
cashmere and lynx and thick oriental rugs
caverns of wealth overlooking the river
that sparkles under the city's lights*

*he rode over the bridge over midtown now silent in the
deep hours, the city was somnolent and the night listened*

Mourning

*it stuck him like a needle
twisting his nerves
more pain than he ever imagined
it ravaged him
suddenly he felt the loss
the steeping trauma of death
pulling him down a tunnel
he was starving
waves fell on him
deep rushing moments of pain
that shook him
could he survive?
before she was here
to be lost but still present
then the stark knife cut
the spirit out of the body
and then he understood
the meaning gripped him clearly*

*but now he mourns
his emotions carry themselves
he rocks back and forth
kneaded into his stomach
her spirit rises
he sees the end*

Memory

I

*Suzanne has copper red hair
she pulls up in a bun
long red nails
he saw her paint in the morning
when he came up to see her
covered with the soot of a night's driving
her kisses tasted sweet*

*'wash your hands' she said
he stumbled over her textbooks to the sink
in her bathroom, rubbed coconut oil soap
over my hands, arms, neck, cheeks,
warm water in his eyes,
face was leather-beaten to delicacy
after fourteen hours of asphalt,
his bones surrendered to the enemy*

*then he had that firm, perfumed body
his head crying in its sores
wounded in the wars that split the
mind like an axe,
the gray cells hit with a whip,
the sense pounded out of them,
their ambitions shot like horses*

*buried underneath the river that
guards the city from peasants
and heretics*

*Suzanne smiled, stroking his face
with tropical winds
his eyes thickened with desire*

II

*last week Suzanne had winked
at her apartment on 55th street
at her job waiting tables on ninth avenue
had exchanged natural blonde locks
and Welsh-Irish stock for red hair
and Cuban ancestry, now a microbiologist
who studies viruses, who studies the molecular
origins of living things
rests in her apartment overlooking the East River
now collapsed on her living room
rug with her cat, she watches the sunset
over the water*

*Friday night he thought of her
waiting for his turn at the wheel
he saw her lying in bed reading of ganglia,
Spiro fibula, oncogenes, lymphocytes and leukemia
he thought of her as the dispatcher honked names
in her red silk Kimono
looking out over the river*

*later, when he was embedded in traffic
Lincoln Center stared stonily
its eyes glistening with high culture
chewing on my bit
the traffic cracked on Broadway
and he flew down the right side of
the island into belching trucks
carrying cement to the tunnel*

*she did leg raises on her floor
her cat munched on dinner
pumping her long legs like pistons
while watching old movies*

*but he sank into the garment district
covered by plastic and boxes
dresses and coats, inching eastward for
weeks, months years, he paid for every sin
the buildings smirked
pelted my taxi with stones, pebbles,
oxidized gargoyles, with double-paned
windows, with typewriters, old mimeograph
machines, giant staplers
cloth cutters and giant swaths of ugly
obsolete inventory, piles of fabric
pushing against his left shoulder —*

*Manhattan opened its giant jaws
filled with layers of debris, like
the stomach of an ancient blue whale
autopsied—he fell into it, sucked into
its heart, digested whole*

*Suzanne rested on her bed
stroking her cat
the stereo playing classical guitar
as she fell asleep on her quilt
but he stayed on the pedal
running the guiltless engine
as it ate and ate greedily
licking its molars on 87 octane*

In the Days of the Last King

*In the days of the last king
the people were content
as the granaries were full
and the seasons correct
famine nor disease afflicted them
and the barbarians kept at bay
the people were so grateful
they consented to the monuments
that filled every corner of the
realm etched in gratitude to
the king who smiled and cheered
at his subjects who obeyed him
but soon his majesty sat on his throne
and his powers left him, old age finally disarmed
what was left
and he went to his exalted grave
bouquets tossed endlessly at
his royal procession
but the king
was not what they had heard
the treasury was empty and
the salts of the river had
poisoned the land*

*the king had built his empire
with the hardest stone
but left his subjects*

*to the mercy of heaven
which did not concede to
his selfish ways*

*the people had suffered
but duped they gave their
loyalty, the king and his family
ruling all the land and all the sea
and even if he was mistaken
the people raised their voices
in singing of him
praise and certainty
preferred to murmurs of truth
infidels being only inches from the gate*

The Desert

*in the cafeteria
over fish sticks, canned corn
and chocolate milk
the teachers mulled over
their school
the din of the hallways
deafening
the squalor profound*

*the brick and the stone
vibrated
and the waves cracked the building
and spread through the barren side streets
the school piled its textbooks high
society layered in
ink and paper
into inventory
the school year ending in June*

*and for months and years
they traveled in the halls
in the broken streets
after so much time
resigned to the iron gates
the graffiti and the ghetto which
like the desert
swept its sands over
the landscape*

The End of the City

*last night
at half past three
they met on the docks
to discuss the future
of the city
standing together
a crowd of solemn representatives
they divided the place
by its spoils and counted
everyone
they counted everyone
who lived in apartments
with doormen, and all the
diplomats for all the consulates
every city worker and everyone
in city housing counted like
all the small businessmen
and taxi drivers and all the
accountants and lawyers and doctors
they divided the city with
the homeless and the prisoners
on Rikers and in the Tombs
and with the mafia and all the
drug dealers in all the boroughs
the city rose out of its sleep
and all the dancers and call girls
and all the actors, actresses and*

*artists and all the writers
were included in the discussions
the sky turned bright red and then
purple and then to night
as wave after wave of people
surrounded city hall and discussed
the future of the city.*

*all the business executives and wall
street brokers and all the secretaries,
clerks, word processors and waiters,
waitresses, heiresses, models and
college professors spun stories
and decided to divide the city
which was nearly broke, with broken
streets and dirty buildings*

*they all sat together
and discussed the future
dividing up the property
and the air, all that made the
city a city. each took his own
thinking that they each only
wanted a tiny part of the city
that somehow belonged to them*

*each and everyone struggled
in the last analysis
wanting more than would ever
be given*

“Drive”

*after hours of sweat
on the streets
Manhattan packed to the last inch
with vehicles circling the
skyscrapers he caught a
fare on the battery
waving at him
in the hot afternoon sun*

*in the rush hour she told
him to drive north to
Connecticut
and he did, pushing
in the sea of exhaust fumes
up the drive
he went up the river
and through the Bronx
with trucks on each side
pressing him forward
in a torrent of noise
and oily parts*

*she wore dark glasses
and a white dress
that clung in the heat*

*she said 'drive'
and he did
as the meter went
he pressed his pedal
and ran through
the suburbs of Westchester
through the tolls
and on they went up the
road on Connecticut's shore
winding north past New Haven
as the sunset*

*he looked at her
now nude, sweat droplets
on her chest
dripping down her body
'drive', she said
moving closer to him
taking off his belt
kissing his abdomen*

*he drove fast up the
highway pushing his way
up past Springfield
through Vermont and New Hampshire
the gas gauge plunged
but the car moved*

*fast they went on the empty
road that curved through the
mountains, the thick woods*

*and the lakes full of bugs
flashed by as they moved
funneling up the side of
the Canadian border*

*he drove, his eyes stayed
like dark saucers all
through the night
as she told him
of her job crunching
numbers, merging corporate
entities into larger pieces
that were soon eaten by
customers who relished them*

*'drive', she said
kissing his thighs
he kept his foot on the pedal
till the speed gauge
didn't register
and they drove all the night
till they parked on the
coast of Maine
the sun breaking over the cold harbor
the first seconds of dawn in the country
he felt no pain*

In a Day

*in a day he drove through
the city, the city was
rich and crowded, the
neighborhoods fell into each other
like a puzzle, he drove like a
demon over every road
from dawn to dusk and through the
night he drove every corner
of every borough attempting
to take every inch of the town, he knew the place well
having driven its streets
for so long, having been raised
in the city that spanned over
the water and was full
brimming with people,
the people were of every kind
gray-haired, blonde, brown,
bald, beautiful, ugly
languages and dialects surrounded him
intonations welled in him
as he thought of every place
and every person he had seen
in the city
he could not fathom every detail
having a limited capacity to
envision everything
he somehow felt cheated*

*as he raced around the city
hour after hour with
the pain that had driven him
but at some point
after he had run through
the Jewish, Italian, black and Hispanic
neighborhoods, after he had
crossed the great Verrazano
three times and the munificent
George Washington twice
and past up Fifth Avenue
through Central Park and into the depths
of Harlem and had watched the
doormen on Park Avenue
and had driven through the tunnel
to Maspeth and Cypress Hills
till everyone had seen his car
racing down potholed streets
and the dirty highways
and he remembered, he had only
wanted to visit the city so muscled and mysterious
he surrendered, never venturing
to drive its streets (all at once) again*

The Bronx

*It was pure romance
the two of them
strolling down the avenue
arms locked
the projects
facing each side of them
stark boxes where they
lived
the Caribbean exchanged for
the gray fearful streets
he worked like a demon
his car working day and night
on the big industrial roads that
poured through the granite
of the native soil a million
cars and trucks to feed the city*

*in the morning he returned
and fell into her on the
couch touching her soul with
his arms and his lips
and then he left her
pregnant and tired
back on the highway*

*back to the city
where he ranged
circling the island
rounding Wall Street
and through the boroughs
day and night
to the airports
and the hotels
and the streets full
of women that filled him*

*but he returned to her
always as first his
son and his daughter born
in the Bronx overlooking
the commuter trains
and the racing traffic
on the New England to
the fireplaces in the suburbs*

*and he worked like the devil
all week all through the year
to cover his medallion
that he wanted free and clear*

*but then one night
parked on the West Side
in the dark breezy drive
over the Hudson
he bought a ticket that
carried him over the horizon
and out of sight*

*to where his children will wonder
when they are older
if they can see his face
hidden, far away
on the other side of the river*

The Search For a Beginning

*the weight of the great university
nestled in his grasp
he strolls the lake
reflecting on the Eighteenth century
when reason and civilization peaked
now having declined on the
south side of Chicago
in the detritus of the aged city
ruined by the post-industrial age
lines form on his still young forehead
telling him that he is lost
having value for the principles of another age
now even the academy rejects
the purity of reason*

*the classics rushed away by the sixties
peopled now by the unread
relativism spread its seeds
literature, philosophy, history
captured in chaos, vacuity
layers of shallow irrationality
added to layers of ancient academe
crimson gowns and smiles at the
neo-gothic chapel shaking hands in the
sweat of June
but now the reckoning
it will be soon*

*he thinks, sadly, bleakly
wondering if he too
noble survivor, will see the end
but for him
a beginning*

Waiting

*the park soft green
in March waits for the gentle
spring sun to cure the grass of
its shyness and for the
city to clear the paths through
the woods
serene and gentle
before the season*

*at night, motionless silence
against the figures of the
sage brownstones lining
the avenue*

*Brooklyn is a noble borough
built four generations ago
full of now restored brick
and stone buildings on
tree lined streets
the park, nestled among
the old neighborhoods that
breathe ethnicity
carries the souls of
people who spoke a hundred languages
to mix in a swirl of others*

*all shades of men and women
all religions and all classes
divided in life but
blended in the trenches of memory
the woods stand as I do
sparse and clean this morning
watching the blue sky rest
on the rows of houses and
apartment buildings that shape
the sky from the top of the hill
I watch and hear
the neighborhoods that sound
in the city like slow drums
working on time
both mine and theirs*

The War

*the war came suddenly
fast bursts of light
and then the sure fury
of razor sharp jets
delivering hell to
the enemy*

*the desert was lit with the
flash of explosives, energy
compacted and released with
death
in the days that soon past
slow and brutal in the
desolate land we battered
with no mercy
we still had tears
for the shattering of lives
and the terror visited on children
and we cried for the victims
of barbarism
and we cried for ourselves
(some did) that we
too were barbarians*

*but the war didn't end
it ran on till the fires*

*that made it
consumed their fuel*

*and the earth survived
smoking with dust
scorched but living*

A Thunderclap

*they said it was
an orange color
a million volts created
by clouds and it struck
one long fatal bolt
like a giant samurai sword
into the tallest tree
next to the soccer field
it glowed and flashed
as pure energy electrons
speeding forward with
unspeakable power
as it hit the people
underneath the tree
and killed the boy*

*he was fifteen
the height of a man
but the soft clear face of a boy
with searching eyes
reddish hair curled above his ears
just watching, waiting for the rain to stop
and then the flash shot across the field
down the tree in an infinitesimal moment
in the breadth of a butterfly
in a part of a second no more than could register
on a human retina*

*he was gone, his life
like all others only a flickering
a tiny view on a world
we discover is infinite,
his parents and his sister
grieved at their loss
their child ripped away
by a lightening storm
dashed from life
from all that mattered
all that was promised
with no reason but
the speed and death
of a thunderclap*

The Puzzle

*it was difficult
you would think harsh
to live like she did
her family on the other side
of the world
and here with a baby
her husband having
nixted his way out
and leaving her alone*

*and her skin was black
the color of dark mahogany
she recognized she was
despite everything
a member of a scorned race
her skin and hair reminding
her of the fact
Chicago not known
for tolerance or mutuality
she saw in the light, blonde
blue eyed women
impossible competition
she being pretty but black
somehow unworthy
sent back to her caste
which survived in the
barren streets that starved them*

*she was not part of that
having earned an education
in French colonial schools
and not part of the descendants
of the slaves who were driven north*

*she was not full of rage
at the bad history that
drove the Americans to a
descending hell*

*she, as lonely as any
fell on herself
to blame for her loss
but it was not fair or kind
nor her fault
she wondered, she knew
the puzzle fixing together
into a uniform piece*

Paradise

Suzanne

*who moves with deft grace
slipping across the tiled floor
with perfected steps
stroking the cold walls with
her stealthy hands
came through the window
and watched him
in studied thought
trying to remember*

*he was older than
his age having seen
more than most have
in just twenty-five years
the sounds of combat
and thunderous beatings
and the cruel hegemony
of a conflict that
transcends him
his eyes know tragedy
as well as his muscled back
that he works in
a day knows sweat
work he was taught
the only true respite*

*he is glad he is not
where he was under
the tyranny of
rage and anger and terror
but he his alone
aching and burning
he thinks, of his homeland
and of her who would
delight him
carry his long face
into the sunny kingdom
of paradise*

Never Stopping

*she spoke in long delicate phrases
it was her trademark
speech coming natural to her
she could converse in endless ways
charmed by the act itself
her figure was sparse
since she ate only rarely
food consumed in small bites
not a small woman but
boney, angular
a pretty fair-skinned face
placed on a wiry frame
insecurity wrapped deep inside
her soul taunted by
ontological misgivings*

*she felt her youth
transforming to early middle age
life could trap her she thought
and it drove her like a cyclone
never resting, stopping but for seconds
or angst would find her
in weak-kneed terror*

*but she survived,
pushing it underground
and never stopping for
feelings that swelled
interminably, unceasingly
within*

The Manager

*the building was thick and barren
rooms as long as a football field
windows reaching high and deep into
shadows of machines that cut cloth
he stood like a man possessed
straining under the weight of his product
cloth piled in mountains
he held yellow receipts in his hand
and calculated the last cents
in the middle of the day
they carried racks through the streets
and trucks crammed the loading docks
the sounds crowded him
he walked down his floor and
his head twisted and like
Achilles the world was on his shoulders*

*but at night he rested
loosening the screws on his temporal lobe
he drank eleven kamikazes at a bar near
the Hudson
and the machines in the empty factory
sank back and he was gone
a hundred miles of dirt on each side of him
the brush in the hills turned a faint purple
before dusk
he sat on the hills and looked at the mountains*

*that were back over the horizon in Mexico
and he was free
it was cool and the river rushed below him
as he sat in the brush and the sun shot its
rays over the silence
he heard the anthem of the country
and then it was night
the Mexicans came wearing
sombreros and the women wore
pretty dresses
and there were pistol shots
and dancing under the sky which
filled with clusters and stars*

*he was gone
over the horizon, over the mountains
the pacific shone as blue as the richest ink
the sky fed on wisps of clouds
and the air burst in long bolts of electric color
his mind bathed in soapy electrons
the air and the water full of his being
his consciousness stretched around the equator
an ethereal rubber band*

*and
he was back in childhood
playing in the streets
running through from one house
to the next
and he played hard with his friends
baseball and football
holidays ran into each other
the world compressed into a couple of blocks*

*but then he came back
like a shot
he lingered at the bar
the bartender wouldn't serve him
he walked out, stumbled to the curve
where a taxi stopped, drove him
past the garment district
to his home in Jersey, that,
like the factory, stood motionless
permanent and vacant*

The Mountains

*the television doesn't lie
they fled like sheep
into the mountains
cold, barren wilderness
they say their homeland,
on the rock strewn slopes, freezing
the news said they were dying,
the mountains, unforgiving
killed them, did the work of
the killer that prayed on them*

*they were abandoned to their fate
no one would save them
before a cacophony
of rage filled the inner sanctum
anger must have poured
like liquid gold across
the world until
planes and soldiers dispatched
to save the wretched people
freezing and dying,
the morality of the republic
at issue, saved in time*

*the world was full of the desperate
said the secretary of defense
the world awash in tragedy*

*the human race full of the starving
destitute, ravaged ones
coexisting with us,
the earth swept with hunger and tyranny
the poor huddled,
as fat prosperity beamed its glory
over the sky and into space*

Hearing the World

*as a boy he was a rebel
undersized and underfed
he used guerrilla tactics
to defend himself
now a man, he is tall
and strong, copper red
hair usually cropped
to show his clean handsome
face to clients who
measure his worth by the
quality of ink and paper
he manufactures
the business wears on him
a crushing pairs of tongs
on his mind, which was always
as sensitive as a
handmade violin
notes resonating
he could always feel the
top and the bottom,*

*the sense of
a person or a group
came to him in an instant
and the feelings were strong
enough for him to withdraw
having never acquired the*

*mental frame to cope with the
ugly noises he could hear
in an acoustical gestalt
life pained him
he worked like the devil
surviving, each day
with his wife's embrace*

Transcendence

*most nights she swirled
above Manhattan in a long
graceful dance
but now she
sat in a village club
as jazz filled it
with a sonorous melody
aromatizing the crowded tables*

*she played the clarinet
and sang swing songs
as the audience sat enraptured
her beauty overwhelming
the small space*

*and afterwards
she left and walked
along the docks
playing to the Hudson
and to the ships passing up
the river*

*in Brooklyn the graffiti
swallowed a schoolyard
and a section of the expressway
she moved like a gazelle
through the maze of projects*

*on a moonless night
the city frozen in sleep*

*she rode the subway cranking
over the Manhattan Bridge
to the empty shops in Chinatown
dawn breaking over the cracked
sidewalks and tenements
bodegas and coffee shops pulling up
their steel sheds
and the dull sound of the morning
drifted into the streets
Suzanne, living in the night
lit a cigarette that glowed in
the sunlight sighing, she fell asleep*

Real World

Suzanne

*who enjoyed a good game of poker
played in a rotating game in a
small house in Bushwick
the men unaware that she was
white, about twenty-five, five
three with wire frame glasses
they smoked and drank bourbon
and cursed in tough Anglo-Saxon
betting five, ten and twenty dollars
on the hands
she played, holding her own
against the whiskey breathed
men with sagging pots
she knew what she was doing
as they shot words about genitals
and foreplay around till four
in the morning,
after the game she could
move around the neighborhood
and observe the families
sleeping together and the
broken streets underneath the El*

*before dawn she could still
move across the river
and in a mirrored miniskirt*

*dance at a club on the west side
leather studded males keeping up
with her
she could move like the devil
sliding across the floor
with the weight of a feather
she slipped out of the club
and in a wisp was asleep
in her apartment over the park
to be
in the morning
prim and ready, blue suited
and high-heeled
trotting down Park Avenue
the real world beckoning*

The Mood

*he felt the inside of his head crack
laden with steel strings
collapsing on his face
the sea of violence just behind
his sterling silver brow
beat the air now
blue and thickening in the
night
later his eyes rose from sleep
and the air burst into orange flames*

*he couldn't control
himself raw and burnt
with horrible demons
that cooked his skin
and devoured him*

*only the morning
when he could feel
the tremors and the sweat
did he cover himself
in a towel
mercy flowing out
like sand
his eyes ran all over
trying to forget*

In Her Eyes

*she must have been a mixture of
Irish and German
her milk white porcelain face
masked a synthesis of emotion
fear which I saw in her eyes
anger which pinched her cheek lines
and her voice which in tremors
etched the inner sides of her
devout Catholic skin*

*you could imagine
the constellations of her life
banal but real, a certainty shaping her
fear and that timorous self*

*surrounded in a sea of
relaxed and fleshy beings
she a small town girl
wedded to it without exception*

*sexier versions of life
stood out with exposed curves
black lace stockings and high heels
walking down the magnificent mile
they existed
but wouldn't sway her
couldn't corrupt her
raised so carefully*

*not the clear, wholesome voice
nor soft compassion in her eyes
she stepping furtively, a cheek in the air*

In the Heat

*in the summer
the city sweated
black drops poured
over cement and
the bridges creaked
under the thunder of trucks
gaseous fumes drifted
from the river and
the basalt and steel
was stained with carbon
the air swept through
the cars and stroked
the benches and trees
and the sun broke
through the dull sounds
that hung over the streets
and the trains worked
with fists and heels
clothes whiffed with smoke
in the thin wet air
but the city was alive
an organism, squirming
in the perspiration
and odors that floated
through conversations
sultry, seasoned words
a saline discourse*

*floating syllables irked
by a timorous night
that sank into the sidewalks
and moved slowly, furtively
in the heat*

The Feast

*as if these imperious gray regimes with barbed wire
suddenly on television
fell in an instant of popular will
like paper Mache
trashed in a moment
the Wall
resonated with drums
the unshaved and long haired
waving atop reinforced concrete
irony and victory to the imposed the dogma
of machine guns now
disappeared in the liberated air*

*then the other edifices, monstrosities
were one by one slaughtered like lambs
the people hungrier than unfed dogs
chewing away at the gray corpses*

*they were starving
for at least a generation
they had swallowed the pills
that war and fascism had given them
with a hard fist and angry diatribes
but they seemed to have survived
walking on the edge
authorial sirens having told the truth*

*could anyone have imagined
the end?
all devoured in a feast?
intellectuals and workers
each tasting the flesh and
looking far out of the cage
its iron bars ripped open
for all the world*

Charity

*it was said he was
the most selfish of the children
his mother's favorite out of nine
he looked down on his younger siblings
who must have been crude greenhorns
to him a man of distinction
who rose like a rocket in
the world of books
a real dandy
who liked good wine
and good living
the load of money he
made when he was still
a very young man
he never shared with
his poor family that
struggled after the
death of their father
he strutted along the
streets in the city
while his brothers and sisters
subsisted in Jewish Brownsville
a bon vivant for sure
till his free spending
left him unemployed and broke
to live on a stipend from
an old friend who out of*

*gratitude repaid monthly for
the money he lent him in the
thirties when he got his girl in trouble*

*in the end,
broken
he sat in a room full of roaches
he didn't "give a damn," he said
and that's the way they buried him*

Cancer

*the buildings were antiseptic
as hospitals should be
but also in form
tall box-like structures
set off from the avenue
overlooking the river
and the drive
emitting the atonal energy
of high tech
here the clinicians
worked in careful
professional methods
science and professionalism
permeating the hallways
otherwise factories
of bodies and diseases
the surgeons and internists
nurses and technicians
worked with deliberate speed
fearsome illnesses
spread through tissues
and even the most modern
of technologies
and the most skilled of minds
were helpless*

*death came in regular fashion
there were no exceptions
physicians could not heal
what refused to
the machines worked with rapidity
lasers and software illuminated
the body but sickness
carried in the cells
did not succumb*

*and the patient
helpless, afraid of death
shivered at night in terror
fear wrapped around her
froze her in time
and gripping the ends of her mind
threw her into oblivion*

*the hospital lost unknowingly
being only an institution, an abstraction
unaware of it or similar fates*

Bright Heaven

*the sun is already hot
air filled with dense bright rays
that hugs our shirts
and the trees bloom
pink and yellow
as the spring captures
the city
young skin and hair
clasp the pastel streets
and sit cross-legged
on the grass
campuses painted in
the loud colors
music pouring out of
rooms and cars*

*the world is
flung in turmoil that
counts itself in
perfect images on the screen
pain burned into the faces
of suffering*

*but even so
if all is tragic
or near hell
the season surrounds*

*the city in a circle
of being, lifting the
air and the sky in a
rush of bright heaven*

Westside

*Their apartment
built from scratch
adorned with antiques and glass bottles
the building abandoned
city taxes having accrued
lost in the new age
Manhattan bursting with green
And black skinned monoliths
They stepped through the relic
Diesel fumes floating up from the street
with their neighbors
plastered the tiny rooms into
living spaces, microscopic
in size to the towers
out the window
but they were committed politically
he walked to his office
in an undershirt and old sneakers
serving the poor in the sight of the
developers who whetted at the prospects
midtown coughing in the distance
he worked for nothing
as she did,
having been educated at a small private college
to the burning injustices that
Americans accept by measure
they rejected the gentry*

*and silkier comforts reminding them of the greed
that permeated the air of midtown
a howling engine, corporate, and old money, European, and
Japanese
with drug and mob cash stuffing
hell's kitchen with wrecking cranes
he wouldn't compromise his principles as sacred as
the pinball games he played
with fixed intensity
suing the landlords every day
for the broken pipes, heatless
apartments, vicious dogs
they lived in the tiny space
and stayed in stubborn resolve
even as midtown moved west towards
the Hudson challenging the poor
for the rights to eleventh avenue
ideals maturing on the tar of their blacktop roof*

Suede Boots

*with long winding curls
of light brown hair
and suede boots
and a blue seaman's jacket
she was out of the past
a sixties woman
though she wasn't old
only a teenager at the end
of the era but now
with the faintest crows feet
she smiles and carries
a radical conversation
communism is dead
but for intellectuals
and Latin Americanists especially
who haven't heard of the death
of Marx when the landlords
and death squads still
kill the peasants
she was raised in an
academic family
taught unconsciously to
think as she does
and live like a radical
bohemian should
she is as gentle as
a light breeze*

*but she keeps her distance
behind her analytical gaze
she is thinking of her last
husband who abandoned her
a latin lover who wrecked
her insides that
seem to have turned to jelly*

*her Spanish is beautiful
and she loves the culture
and the people
America seen only as in its
usual role of imperial father*

*her father must have been
like her husband having
left her mother
when she was ten with
four children
thinking of himself before
them
she like her brothers
wants to be like her father
and mother's father
she can sacrifice to find
what she wants
now that the sixties
are but history
she a young but
always growing older woman
moving quickly towards
mid life*

*she doesn't smile as
having hurt enough
she can't stand
and let all and
everyone in*

Tribes

*in the morning
the guns stopped
the thunderous murderous
shells and the powder of
animus stopped by decree
the warning of the UN
the collective will of
a construct in the high corridors
bent by long devastating wars
now resolute, professional, dignified
by the twentieth century
painted across the horizon
and the minds of the wicked
the mountains are full of armed men
for the feuds in these parts last
for generations and generations
held deep the Jungian unconscious
scratched on the walls
ugly curses that show the
true side of Darwin's theory
a wave of undiagnosed feeling
tramples the thick hills and
the streets that remember two
world wars and now after the fall
of the last tyranny
dig deep into the soup of the primordial
the tribal*

*as the electronic, antiseptic world
moves in the early morning
cool, clean, distant
uninvolved, unhurt, unseen*

The Riot

*we only saw the images
hot orange flames torching
the dark structure
the town had exploded
mayhem and broken glass
and hundreds of more fires
crashed into the soup of
unformed anger, the metaphors
swam around in incandescent
television scenes
there were thousands in the streets
the stores picked like open closets
and others burned to charcoal
the country had wavered and
then shook, the waves shivered from
the west to the east
and nothing mattered but the
violence which cooked like
steaming lava
what went wrong they all asked
what happened
who were the sinners?
but no one could agree but for
the web that wound
like a silk robe
around the smoldering city
the smoke staining the sky*

*with black imprints, the air
milled with words that stung
and scattered and
the ocean full of the souls
that were now dead
we saw, we mourned*

To Remember

*in the early morning
he walks slowly across
the bridge looking at
the harbor and river
ripple in the wind
behind him is Brooklyn
that he can remember as
a child and in front
Manhattan that he knew
as a young man
sprinting across the
streets in his hat
and suspender trousers
when he was young
times square was the
center of it all
and he would dance with
his wife and see the
great movies in the
thirties
he can remember
when he was as strong as
a steel rod, as fast as a
rabbit, could sprint down
Broadway during his lunch hour
without a sweat
and he can remember he was*

*a young Turk
a rising star in his arena*

*but now he walks across the bridge
in his two piece suit and straw hat
laughing with a crinkled grin
smiling at the bikers and the
young girls with cascading hair
and tiny shorts
he remembers when he walked
with his honey
when songs were melody
neighborhoods were pretty
and his wife more gorgeous than
a movie queen*

The Rain

*the rain fell on the asphalt
gathering streams that washed
the brick and dripped from
the awnings and streets were
dark, somnolent, smoking
wisps of air pushed through
the crack of the window
as I drove high over the city
on the Triboro
the lights spread like stars
as I rushed over the bridge
sky flushed blue and black*

*in midtown
the hotels winked
luminescent lobbies
still in the early hours
but for the lone doorman
and women dressed for
labor, dark red lips and
long thin dresses*

*the air was clean now
as the garbage trucks
moved loud and clumsily
across Manhattan
and the street workers*

*drilled into the asphalt
to resurrect pipes and wires
and the cabs drove up and down
the avenues in symphony
as the city cleared in the
deep night*

*and deals rolled all over
the city in the dark
over the boroughs in the
bowels of neighborhoods
as the police circled
as everyone slept
as the UN stood in silence
and the office towers
were cleaned and the
city hall closed
the boundaries disappeared
in the heart of the city
the air floated with
deals, pills and powder*

*love worked its way over
the city
and painted the bedrooms
and the schools and the stores
were covered with it
lacquered in its essence
until the morning
when the sun would bake
the sides of the buildings*

*and the cars and trucks
and it would dry
waxen and lost*

*the city would rise
in the hot morning sun
after the rain
and the sounds would be
heard as far as Europe
and Asia and everywhere
as the planes would land
at Kennedy laden with
people and the stuff of
the city would wander
the earth*

*carried away in suitcases
and microwaves
far into the future
far into the past*

The Prince

*the only thing I
can remember is when
he died,
the afternoon sky full of clouds
the streets so quiet the walls of
the house immobile, lost
being only seven
when in second grade
we were let home
and suddenly black and white
images straining, adults staring
sorrowfully, he was dead
his coffin drawn by horses
and in the film clips
you can see he was a great man
world leaders pacing forward
behind the draped box*

*a man we know imperfect but
still he shone with
the glow of a mission
a 'torch' he said
words more telling than
accomplishments
having only three years to
carry the earth
and the nation he*

crinkled his handsome brow

*having said that his hopes
would outlive him and even his
children, he died in seconds
in front of us*

*but his image still rises in
those who can remember
his strong but sensitive voice
his noble but worrying eyes*

A Woman of Many Designs

*Suzanne in her apartment
on fifty-fifth street
knitting a sweater
lying on an oriental rug
listening to drops in the sink
moved her metallic blue needles
to the sounds of the faucet*

*she could feel her bed
upstairs in Pennsylvania
in her mother's house
painted light gray
a hundred yards from the
high school
hears the sounds of
the football team
the coach's whistle
tapping her eardrum*

*and she remembered
the dolls on her dresser
wearing cotton and linen dresses
the feel of the hard wood floor
and the thick warmth of her
mother's quilt*

*she played wiffle ball catch
with Thomas
running up and down the hill
ten, twenty, thirty times
the grass was like spinach
with yellow dandelions like squash
she laughed in bursts, reeking her bones
rolling down with Thomas staining his
shirt green*

*dropping her knitting
she draws with charcoal
on a clean white tablet
draws the houses along
her street draws
the old woman Aida
in soft dark lines
who planted tulips
in her front yard and
sold tomatoes and sweet corn
had a million lines
from the tips of her fingers
to the high arch on her hairline*

*now she is high in the mountains
sitting next to him in the truck
driving fast through the thick woods
her silky looks on the dashboard*

*putting eye shadow on in a bathroom
customers outside drinking beer*

*the cool Vermont air seeping
through the side window next to the sink
they move on to almost the border
camping high in the woods*

*building a white birch fire
the ground cold as metal
and the night sky
hung itself on a circle of moons
worshiping the earth*

*covered with lambs wool
she fell into him
crossing an ocean
as the fire sang*

*in the city
with stony eyes
she sleepwalks
throws her blonde hair back like straw
dropping down the old stairs
her boots knocking the wood so the
Polish woman could hear her
knitting afghans on
her sofa
she scratches the pavement walking down her block
staring down ninth avenue as far as her sight
her thin thighs carrying her weight
on the heels of her boots*

*he is selling umbrellas
on Wall Street*

*piled together like bodies
as the clouds darken
to militancy
the buildings press tiny streets
like unwanted children*

*at seven dollars each
they sell like hot cakes
blue, black and red designer ones
he bought them from a jobber
in the morning
they stuff his pockets
before the sky explodes*

*in manmade tunnels the wind masses
whipping granite and Plexiglas windows
rain chucking, pelting the buildings
like ritual bullets
underneath an entrance
finishing his stock
he buttons his soaked jacket
feels his drenched sneakers
eating his socks*

*later she undresses for him
in a loft on eleventh avenue
dropping her clothes along
the empty wooden floor
her hands and legs
dancing in a ballet with her long hair
twisting like a brush polishing silver*

*she smiled, raising her fingers
dancing on her toes
her hair glistened*

*with long totes he watched her
ravishing her breasts
till his eyes bleeding saucers
hung around his knees
his arms made clay*

*and Suzanne rose like paper
passing through the window
turned orange turned purple
flew like a bird*

*he banged his head and fell backwards
falling like a martinet*

*the sky over the Hudson turned crimson
as she flew over the horizon like thunder
kissed Weehawken with thick lips
she went like smoke like vapor
like a subatomic alphabet soup out she went
circled the globe
scratching the continents
like pool balls
she lived a hundred lives*

*gave birth, planted grain, smoked fish
burned leaves, knitted, baked, typed,
changed diapers, mourned, painted landscapes,*

*spoke two hundred languages, cried at four
thousand weddings, laughed at twenty thousand
parties, mopped, brewed tea, named nine hundred
children, had six hundred lovers, washed clothes,
pots, wrote poetry, novels, was divorced,
cooked five million times till at last she
was buried, died and Suzanne split into
eleven dimensions within less time than a frog
has to devour a bug*

*she stood behind him
as he turned away from the window
white as chalk
she was flickering
like an ancient film
subdividing into an audience of clones*

*she raced over the city
swimming through the tombs of wall street
ripping up buy orders, typing on terminals
vacuuming offices, rearranging furniture
until finally she coalesced into one woman
solitary, polishing her nails on top
of the Chrysler building*

*from his window he watched her
waving at him wearing a gold nightgown with a necklace
of giant emeralds
he scratched his beard and swiggled Jack Daniels
as she did double triple somersaults backwards
on top of the RCA building then ice skating
wearing powder blue and white ice skates*

*skating to music by Rogers and Hammerstein
atop Rockefeller Center on a Friday night
before the applause of twenty thousand fans
and Olympic judges suspended by the weight
of ten thousand commercials and sponsors
Suzanne dove into a Cajun restaurant
wearing nothing but pink panties, as required, in the West
Village served Daiquiri's, Bloody Mary's, Key Lime Pie
and blackened Salmon in a butter sauce, ribs, chicken,
Bay Shrimps in Creole sauce, hurled garlic bread and
sesame sticks on the clean plates of peachy boys
her elbow popped a waiter writing a check
spilled fresh whip cream, blueberries, strawberries
and chocolate cherry liquor,, staining ties, white shirts
and thin wrist watches, Suzanne slipped out the back door*

*feeling cold in just lingerie
she put on black leather and sun glasses
to window shop on Bleeker street*

*never to forget she was a woman,
a woman of many designs*

The Offerings

*so the sky opened and
the streets filled with
empty cans and papers
leaflets and videotapes
old radio songs drifted
downward and photographs of
the dead and antique toys
and old almanacs piled together
in the alleys and on the
sidewalks*

*and people drove by in
their late model cars and
ogled at the vintage debris
that had fallen
thousands of tons
sleek aerodynamic sport cars
white, red and metallic blue
opened their low trunks
and deposited the old song books
and calendars, baseball cards and
am radios and tweed coats
all carefully folded into trunks
of slim cars with slim, clear
skinned drivers, male and female
with dark glasses*

*and the air was cool
the sky cloudless
the sun distant
and the streets cleaned
of junk piled into rows*

Country

*the land is rich, meadows
and rows of crops nourished
on clean wet earth
forests and small towns
filled with purity
succored with fresh air
and deep thick unadulterated
rural thoughts flowing
over the wheat and corn
and through the barns and
churches painted with
generations, lacquered
consciousness divorced from
the dense ugly cities
the mind is clean, clear
not
brooding, selfish, inhaling the
smoking rings of metropole, locked
in turbines, sucking up
the dirt and death in the
projects glued to the skyline
now etched in surreal, post-
modern sculptures, glass and metal
cut in the sky, temples to the
universe
the land stretches out on the highways
forever, forest and fields and farms*

*pristine by the virtues of the big city
even in the morning, as dawn etches
the office towers and colors the neighborhoods
the sun like a Greek God
sweeps across the land to the mouth of
the Mississippi
touching the water, warming the earth*

California

*they knew each other for so long
their identities fused
knowing since they grew up
next to each other
every thought and grimace
the other had
when they moved to the city
Los Angeles
the dense sprawl next to the pacific
they took their Wisconsin roots
stuffed deep in them
he worked on cars
his clear blue eyes
never flinching
working all day and night
oil and gas and engines
painting the surface
and scratching to make him bleed
while she waited on tables
her farm bred looks
clean and simple, pure
loving kindness
they toiled until they were finished
and at night in the wee hours
they laid on the beach and
tasted lemon and tobacco
on each others' lips and tongues*

*the ocean made short waves
that pushed the sand in small
ripples forward
they loved the smell of the ocean
and the smell of the other
and they rested as the sun
shone on the big Pacific
holding each others fingers
feeling what they knew
what they wanted*

Capitol

*the city was hot caught
in the velvet sting of
May on the plains of central
Texas
the air hung with layers of
sunlight that scorched skin
dark brown
and in the center of
town near the river
metallic spires of the
new world rose above
the hot flaxen land
fixed into the glove
of a microwave universe*

*but at night though the
office towers
disappeared and downtown
the music flowed out of
clubs, unformed rock and
country beating the night
with cool staccato rhythms
the edges of the soul
moving across the dance floors*

*and in gentlemen's bars
young babes rolled their*

*breasts and sculpted hips
at customers who
stared through them
and the Texans drank beer
and smoked and danced
in the cool night
flesh and music and alcohol
floated through the dark
sex whiffed in the nostrils
capturing the eyes
and the mind sank into
the scraggly hills
and the stark beauty of the plains
and the land seemed far and infinite
beyond the housing tracts
beyond the malls and radio
Texas flashed its fire
in the bars
flushed with sounds
cracking in the old buildings
whipping the chairs and walls
conquering before the first
rays of dawn
the strength of his arm*

*he loved the stones
which glided underneath his hands
picking up the large white ones
he gripped them, felt their essence
the hardness reverberated
and his muscles twitched*

*as he threw them down into
the woods and the city
perched in the distance
imposed its broad imperial
buildings on the horizon
not mountains which could shoulder
the sky like the Rockies or the Alps
but the broad muscular expanse
of the city which hides
dense communities in a labyrinth
of steel and concrete
dense moving masses concentrated
in a few miles of the earth
wrapped in wires and chips
and clamorous sounds
at night he saw the waves of people
traveling through the streets
packing the sidewalks and the subways
sounds and smells filled him with
curiosity
but back on the hill
he watched the city in abstract
the distance fixing his view
he saw its unity
and the stones he carried
he threw with speed
but the skyline stood
broad, unmoved
by the strength of his arm
or the depth of his gaze*

Creation

*in the beginning
the universe blew like
a flash smaller than the
smallest dot blew itself
out four forces of eternity
and the dust of God's fingers
formed stars
the whiffs off his palms
formed planets
and we emerged
in the wet clay
rising from the green seas
building dense stone
and crystalline altars
and the light of the heavens
captured in opaque rooms
with perfect machines
moves towards him
rising above the earth
scratching the skies
and wading out into
the far deserts
cold and grasping
faint glimmers are bent
in time and lost
in the night*

The Philanthropist

*Suzanne looked out of her apartment
at the dense canopy of trees
that spread south towards Midtown
she slid out of bed
her pink negligee clung
to her slim hips
and her dark red hair
fell in long thick curls
down her back
she drank tea for breakfast
and dressed in black leather
to go shopping on Fifth Avenue*

*in the heart of Brooklyn
the Hassidim walked in groups
along the old parkway
that the city seemed to repair
the high holy days
preoccupied them in fervor
and ritual
the men walked in black suits
with dark hats and long beards
piety in all things
valued far beyond any wealth
the women in wigs and long dresses
and the children dressed too
in the manner of tradition*

they walked together along the streets

*Suzanne finished shopping and
had lunch, fresh lobster and wine
before going home
to polish her antiques and paint*

*the orthodox prayed all day
while their neighbors worked
in hospitals and restaurants
went to prison-like schools
or sat on their stoops in the
warm early autumn air*

*Suzanne, who admired Matisse
brushed long strokes of
a beach in the south of France
carefully etching the house
she used to own over the ocean*

*the Jews went back to their homes
after hours of prayer and ecstasy
recounting the tenets of their
religion, older than Greece or Rome
and ended the fast*

*as the sunset over the park
Suzanne had veal and more wine
rays of sun stroked her table
and the thick Chinese rugs
making love as the sky turned to night*

*in Brooklyn they laughed and ate
around the tables with dozens
of family sharing the food
and in the other neighborhoods
they played basketball
listened to Salsa and rap music*

*after midnight Suzanne rose
from her sleep and flew
over the river to the neighborhoods
she sat in the bars as customers
got drunker and drunker
and watched as drugs moved
from one block to the next
the police working like rats
she watched the pious dance
and drink to the holy one
and needles work into the veins
of the addicted*

*Suzanne, a cosmopolitan
could not stay long
but had to go to Paris
to see her friends
but she devoted herself
working hard through the night
until she could not stay
appointments crowding her
moments now and forever*

Stones

*he was touching the ground
different textures of pavement
and the dry dirt at the edge
of the park gave him pleasure
walking down fifth past the zoo
in the hot sun in June
the feel of the hard cobblestones
made his moist palms quiver
childhood flashed in a moment
as he saw himself at seven running
down a hill to a dark blue ocean
full of boats and people
he loved it, those stones
the feel of them held him
in long memories
the heavy stones carried him
he was under the Christmas tree
in Vermont, clothed in thick woolens
after sleighing for hours
drinking hot chocolate
his mother a few feet away*

*the perspiration on his hands slid over
the clean asphalt below the curb
and he was on another beach
this time running over hot sand
to the end of a fence*

*the sun beat down warlike
toasting his face
he climbed the fence and dove
the ocean was what saved him
later he was covered with cream
in a beach house touching his wounds
but he was to survive
the tropics were too beautiful
too exquisite for him to die
in adolescent pain*

*but he could remember many beaches
from one end of the world to the other
and gliding touches and warm skin*

*he scratched the edge of the curb
to see if it was real*

*women filled his mind but he couldn't
sort them, they floated in one after
the other but kept moving
they came and went his apartment
filled and emptied
and his jobs one after the other
moving in and out
nothing was permanent but his
fear which would run circles
around his eyes and press him
he was always alone
the city pushed in on him
closing on his sides*

*he was touching the red marble
in the mall surrounded by
a waterfall and escalators
and the embroidered uniforms of
doormen*

*and the stone was cool and rich
and he was sitting on a patio
and the city was rich and cool below them
and for once he had everything*

July

*the air smokes
through the streets
steamed in the sun
the city, living on
the far side of the lake
takes the dark clouds
off the prairie
from that ruthless god
who burns pavement
and milky white skin
shaded blocks of red brick are
fine in the dense sweat of late afternoon
after the ice and wind of three seasons
now the sky with its
hot belt brings the city back*

*the industrial
scraped of rust bares itself
to the streets
cauterized by the urbane
laid to the purview of the highways
artifacts to the deep muscle
of this century
in solitude praying to the digital photons
of the next*

*in the heat
the girls strip
to their figures
tantalizing the eyes of the male
caught in his blood
in the physiology of his hormones
pounding his frame*

*the city touches the sky
with steel etchings
in the language of the future
sending furtive echoes in the open air
they return unanswered
but the old neighborhoods live in
the steamy air with the hot talk of
the summer
vapor sifting through the streets churning
sleeping in the long deep mounds of the night
dreaming in the soft breezes of the morning
dying with the first shadows of the sun
touching that cool virgin morning air
again reborn*

The Angels

*she died and God must have taken her
her goodness palpable to any Hebrew angel*

*one of the last times I saw her
she was smiling and laughing
calling me over*

*and she was gripping my hand not
with strength but with
vibrant love, with the love
of ninety years cradled
in her soft hands in the
energy in the fibers of
those hands radiating
through my arms
as if in those aged fingers she was
tapping the fires of the world*

*I could only think
in a moment that the room
was lit with deep joy
like a small child at Halloween
brightened in an iota
of timeless interminable thought
the air dimensioned in the sounds
that carry the soul
and the universe whispered*

*but she was my grandmother
and her spirit had to live
it rose from the grave that
Sunday I'm sure
leaving the cemetery
told to move on
it carried into the souls of
the living*

The Sky

*The sky had but a glimpse of clouds
High ceiling mists spreading over the horizon
The sun working its way into the morning
The harbor was clean
The air felt so new
Gentle in the last days before Autumn
The trees waited from the lower Hudson
across the Palisades
Sentry like standing over the river
as it crawled far up into the deep woods
North of Albany, Saratoga, into the Adirondacks
On the coast, the waters lapped on the sand
Talking to the pine trees south of Staten Island
Down toward Cape May, Delaware,
To the southern shores of the Chesapeake*

*in the mountains bears foraged over the highway
where trucks moved across the Appalachians
past Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, to the Ohio
and then across the continent
towns and villages, opening their centers
the roads passing*

*in the streets of the city, people walked
under the sky, oblivious*

until the planes hit, like missiles

*the sky tortured by smoke
hearts bleeding in the fractured air*

*when the sun set, and the fires in lower
Manhattan glowed in the darkness
Rescue workers pulling from the rumble
Suzanne set above the city
Her eyes frozen as the dead walked through the streets*

*She looked out at the night sky
Casting her strength around the lip of the Battery
Below the shattered mounds smoldering
She stayed*